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Elegy
Written in a Country Churchyard

Now fades the glimmering
landscape on the sight,
And all the air a solemn
stillness holds

Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard

By Thomas Gray

Chicago: F. J. Trezise
1910

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Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard.

The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,
The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea,
The plowman homeward plods his weary way,
And leaves the world to darkness and to me.

Now fades the glimmering land-
scape on the sight,
And all the air a solemn still-
ness holds,
Save where the beetle wheels
his droning flight,
And drowsy tinklings lull the
distant folds.

Save that from yonder ivy-
mantled tow'r
The moping owl does to the
moon complain
Of such as, wand'ring near
her secret bow'r,
Molest her ancient solitary
reign.

Beneath those ragged elms,
that yew-tree's shade,
Where heaves the turf in
many a mould'ring heap,
Each in his narrow cell for
ever laid,
The rude forefathers of the
hamlet sleep.

The breezy call of incense-
breathing morn,
The swallow twitt'ring from
the straw-built shed,
The cock's shrill clarion, or
the echoing horn,
No more shall rouse them
from their lowly bed.

For them no more the blazing
hearth shall burn,
Or busy housewife ply her
evening care;
No children ran to lisp their
sire's return,
Or climb his knees the en-
vied kiss to share.

Oft did the harvest to their
sickle yield,
Their furrow oft the stubborn
glebe has broke;
How jocund did they drive
their team afield!
How bow'd the woods be-
neath their sturdy stroke!

Let not Ambition mock their
useful toil,
Their homely joys, and des-
tiny obscure;
Nor Grandeur hear with a
disdainful smile
The short and simple an-
nals of the poor.

The boast of heraldry, the
pomp of pow'r,
And all that beauty, all
that wealth e'er gave,
Await alike th' inevitable
hour:
The paths of glory lead
but to the grave.

Nor you, ye proud, impute to
these the fault
If Memory o'er their tomb no
trophies raise,
Where through the long-drawn
aisle and fretted vault
The pealing anthem swells
the note of praise.

Can storied urn or animated
bust
Back to its mansion call
the fleeting breath?
Can Honour's voice pro-
voke the silent dust,
Or Flatt'ry soothe the dull
cold ear of death?

Perhaps in this neglected spot
is laid
Some heart once pregnant
with celestial fire;
Hands, that the rod of empire
might have sway'd,
Or waked to ecstasy th' liv-
ing lyre.

But knowledge to their eyes
her ample page
Rich with the spoils of time
did ne'er unroll;
Chill Penury repress'd their
noble rage,
And froze the genial cur-
rent of the soul.

Full many a gem of purest
ray serene
The dark unfathom'd caves
of ocean bear;
Full many a flower is born
to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on
the desert air.

Some village Hampden that
with dauntless breast
The little tyrant of his
fields withstood,
Some mute inglorious
Milton here may rest,
Some Cromwell guiltless
of his country's blood.

Th' applause of list'ning sen-
ates to command,
The threats of pain and ruin
to despise,
To scatter plenty o'er a
smiling land,
And read their history in a
nation's eyes —

Their lot forbade: nor cir-
cumscribed alone
Their growing virtues, but
their crimes confined;
Forbade to wade thro'
slaughter to a throne,
And shut the gates of
mercy on mankind;

The struggling pangs of
conscious truth to hide,
To quench the blushes of
ingenuous shame,
Or heap the shrine of
Luxury and Pride
With incense kindled at
the Muse's flame.

Far from the madding
crowd's ignoble strife
Their sober wishes never
learn'd to stray;
Along the cool, sequester'd
vale of life
They kept the noiseless
tenor of their way.

Yet ev'n these bones from in-
sult to protect
Some frail memorial still
erected nigh,
With uncouth rhymes and
shapeless sculpture deck'd,
Implores the passing trib-
ute of a sigh.

Their name, their years, spelt
by th' unletter'd Muse,
The place of fame and
elegy supply:
And many a holy text
around she strews,
That teach the rustic
moralist to die.

For who, to dumb Forgetfulness a prey,
This pleasing anxious being e'er resigned,
Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day,
Nor cast one longing ling'ring look behind?

On some fond breast the parting soul relies,
Some pious drops the closing eye requires;
E'en from the tomb the voice of Nature cries,
E'en in our ashes live their wonted fires.

For thee, who, mindful of
th' unhonour'd dead,
Dost in these lines their
artless tale relate;
If chance, by lonely con-
templation led,
Some kindred spirit shall
inquire thy fate —

Haply some hoary-headed
swain may say,
'Oft have we seen him at
the peep of dawn
Brushing with hasty
steps the dews away
To meet the sun upon
the upland lawn.

'There at the foot of yonder nodding beech
That wreathes its old fantastic roots so high,
His listless length at noontide would he stretch,
And pore upon the brook that babbles by.

'Hard by yon wood, now smiling as in scorn,
Mutt'ring his wayward fancies he would rove,
Now drooping, woeful-wan, like one forlorn,
Or crazed with care, or cross'd in hopeless love.

'One morn I miss'd him on
the custom'd hill,
Along the heath, and
near his favourite tree;
Another came; nor yet
beside the rill,
Nor up the lawn, nor at
the wood was he:

'The next with dirges due
in sad array
Slow through the church-way
path we saw him borne.
Approach and read (for
thou canst read) the lay
Graved on the stone be-
neath yon aged thorn:'

THE EPITAPH

Here rests his head upon
the lap of Earth
A Youth, to Fortune and to
Fame unknown.
Fair Science frown'd not
on his humble birth,
And Melancholy mark'd
him for her own.

Large was his bounty,
and his soul sincere,
Heav'n did a recom-
pense as largely send:

He gave to Mis'ry all he
had, a tear,
He gain'd from Heav'n ('twas
all he wish'd) a friend.

No farther seek his merits
to disclose,
Or draw his frailties from
their dread abode,
(There they alike in trem-
bling hope repose,)
The bosom of his Father
and his God.

Here endeth "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" by Thomas Gray, as lettered and done into a book by F. J. Trezise, Chicago, 1910. Two hundred copies privately printed, of which this is No. 7

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